

Mammograms and Breast Cancer



A mammogram is a special kind of x-ray of the breasts. Mammograms are used to help find breast cancer early enough that it can still be cured. Mammograms are recommended for women over 40 years old even if they have no signs of breast cancer. Mammograms are also recommended for younger women who have symptoms of breast cancer or who have a high risk of getting breast cancer.

A mammogram can save your life. Mammograms can show tumors that may be cancer long before they can be felt. Treating tumors when they are still small makes curing cancer easier.

You usually need to go to a special clinic to get a mammogram. FDA inspects and certifies all places in the United States where mammograms are done. Look for the FDA certificate at the clinic where you go for your mammogram. FDA certification means the clinic's equipment and staff meet federal standards and that your mammogram will be safe and of high quality.



Who Gets Breast Cancer?

Any woman can get breast cancer. Each year, about 185,000 women in the United States get breast cancer and about 44,000 die from it.

You may be more likely to get breast cancer if you:

- Have a mother or sister who had breast cancer.
- Have inherited certain genes. These genes are

How to Examine Your Breasts

1) Look at your breasts in a mirror to see if there is anything you haven't noticed before such as:

- discharge from the nipples
- change in how the nipple looks
- change in how the skin looks.

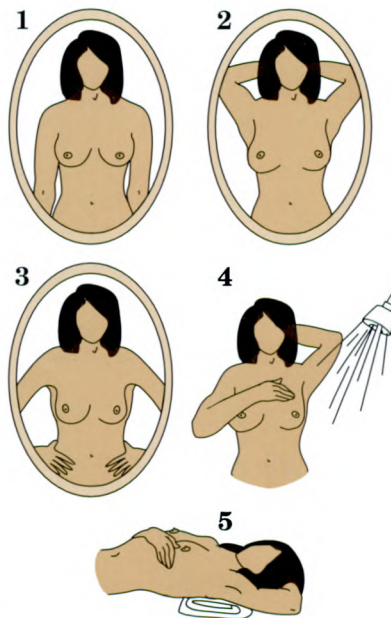
2) Still looking in the mirror, join your hands behind your head and press them gently against the back of your neck. Are there any changes from last month in how your breasts look?

3) Still looking in the mirror, press your hands on your hips. Bow slightly forward, pulling your shoulders and elbows forward. Look for changes since last month in how your breasts look.

4) When you're in the shower and your skin is soapy, do this exam. Raise your left arm. Using 3 or 4 fingers of your right hand, begin at the outer edge of your breast. Press your fingers firmly into your breast and slowly move your hand in circles until you reach the nipple.

Make sure you examine the entire breast. In the same way, examine the area between the breast and armpit, and then the armpit itself. Do you feel any lump under the skin? Gently squeeze the nipple. Is there any discharge? Do the same thing with your right arm raised and your left hand examining your right breast.

5) Get out of the shower, dry off, and lie down on your back. Repeat the same exam as in #4.



How Breast Cancer is Treated

There are a number of treatments for breast cancer. The treatment depends on the type of tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and other facts you and your doctor will discuss. Some treatments are:

- Lumpectomy—Surgery that removes the lump or tumor and a small amount of breast tissue around it, leaving the rest of the breast. A lumpectomy is usually the preferred treatment when cancer hasn't spread outside the breast.
- Total Mastectomy—Surgery that removes the entire breast and usually the adjoining lymph nodes. This may be necessary when there is more than one cancer in the breast, or when a single cancer is large when compared to the breast. Breast reconstruction is usually available to women who have had a breast removed. If you have a breast removed, you may want to talk with your doctor about various types of surgical breast reconstruction and decide if reconstruction is right for you.
- Radiation Therapy—Radiation from special equipment is aimed at the tumor to kill cancer cells and shrink the tumor.
- Treatment with one or more drugs.

Radiation and drug treatment are often given after surgery.

Examinations Are Important

Three kinds of exams can help detect breast cancer:

- Mammography
- Doctor's exam
- Self-exam

more common in people with Jewish ancestors from Eastern Europe.

- Had your first menstrual period before you were 12.
- Stopped having periods after you were 50.
- Never had children or had your first child when you were over 30.
- Have had radiation treatments to your chest area.

Also, the older you are, the more likely you are to get breast cancer. Remember, though, that one out of four women who get breast cancer don't have any of these risks.

What If My Mammogram Shows A Problem?

Mammograms can show if the inside of the breast looks normal. But a mammogram can't show for sure whether you have breast cancer.

If you have a mammogram that doesn't look normal, your doctor will probably suggest a biopsy—a tissue sample of the breast. A biopsy is minor surgery. The breast tissue from a biopsy is tested in a laboratory to see if it's cancerous.

Remember, just because a problem area shows up on your mammogram that doesn't mean you have cancer. Cancer can only be diagnosed by a lab test on tissue from your breast.



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It's important to have a doctor examine your breasts at least once a year. It's also important to examine your breasts yourself once a month. Some women find it's easiest to do this at the same time each month, like when your menstrual period ends.

How to Find a Clinic

To find out what mammography clinics in your area are certified by FDA, call 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) or a local chapter of the American Cancer Society listed in your phone book. If you are hearing impaired, you can call 1-800-332-8615 TTY.

If you have computer access to the World Wide Web, you can find a list of FDA-certified facilities on <http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/faclist.html>

For more information write to FDA, HFE-88, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857 or call 1-800-532-4440.

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